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TAGS: [CASC](#) [ECON](#) [EFIN](#) [ENIV](#) [ETRD](#) [IMF](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: WORLD WATER FORUM PROVIDES A DRY-RUN FOR THE
OCTOBER WORLD BANK/IMF MEETING IN ISTANBUL

REF: A. ISTANBUL 57
[1](#)B. 08 ISTANBUL 208

[1](#)1. (U) Summary and Comment: During March 16-22, 2009, over 25,000 people from more than 60 countries attended the Fifth Triennial World Water Forum (WWF) in Istanbul. The 71-member U.S. delegation was headed by Alonzo Fulghum, Acting Director of USAID, who gave the opening and closing Ministerial statements on behalf of the United States, WWF outcomes will be reported septel. Turkish government and Istanbul municipality preparations provided a relative smooth meeting, although the organizers were scrambling at the last minute to tie the event together. A network of shuttle buses and ferries to the venue helped attendees avoid being tied up in Istanbul's legendary traffic congestion. A strong police presence likely deterred some unauthorized protesters; nevertheless, police employed riot control measures on opening day, and 17 demonstrators were arrested. Given the size and international flavor of the conference, the WWF presented a useful preview for the upcoming World Bank/IMF meeting this October; about 23,000 people attended the World Bank/IMF Annual meeting in Singapore in 2006. End Summary and Comment.

[1](#)2. (U) Istanbul hosted a larger than expected turn-out for the Fifth World Water Forum (WWF) held between March 16 and [1](#)22. WWF organizers aimed to draw 20,000 people to the event, outdoing the 2006 WWF in Mexico City, which about 15,000 people attended. WWF Secretariat staff told us they were concerned when, on the eve of the Forum, the number of pre-registrants had reached almost 30,000. Over 23,000 attended the opening day alone, yet the actual number of attendees was over 25,000 for the week. At times the venue felt the weight of the crowd, since some meeting rooms could not physically handle the numbers of interested attendees. Overall, the WWF Secretariat and venue successfully accommodated the large numbers of attendees.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Construction of the venue facilities was constantly behind schedule, forcing a mad scramble in the weeks leading up to opening day (Ref A). The primary venue, the Sutluce Congress Center, has been under stop and go construction for the past 10 years. The latest interruption occurred in the fall, when the organizers replaced the contractor, causing additional delays. One week before opening day, Ahmet Saatci, Deputy Secretary to the WWF Secretariat, confessed to

us the work on the venue was similar to how the Turks play European Football; "we fall behind, but then we score in the last minute." The final product appeared to meet the needs of both the organizers and attendees.

¶4. (U) Transportation to the venue at Sutluce seemed to work relatively well, a significant feat in congested Istanbul. Despite the existing lack of public transportation routes to the main WWF site, shuttle buses carried most of the attendees to and from their hotels. A ferry between Sutluce and a few popular local landings, which offered a scenic and apt means of transportation from the Bosphorus to the WWF sites, was suspended on opening day for security reasons; however, by the second day the ferries were operating on schedule, and many WWF attendees utilized them. Strict police traffic control made vehicular travel to the main Forum area manageable, though parking spaces were limited. Also, several Americans were scammed by unscrupulous taxi drivers who took advantage of Turkey's two existing legal currencies to avoid giving back the correct change. Note: Turkey switched to "Turkish Lira" (TL) on January 1, 2009; however "New Turkish Lira" or (YTL) is still legal currency until December 31. The value of TL and YTL are identical, but the physical bills look different. End Note.

¶5. (U) There was a strong security presence at the WWF, and throughout the city, in the run-up to the event, and this presence continued during the entire week. Thousands of police were visible at the venue and at popular gathering locations during the WWF. Several water-related demonstrations took place during the week, the principal one occurring on opening day. The Turkish police used water cannons (a point highlighted by the press) to quickly break up the demonstration, which took place in a restricted area

just outside the Forum: police arrested 17 protesters. An American citizen and a German were deported after unrolling a banner inside the venue protesting "No Risky Dams!" during the opening ceremony (the two had been given the alternative of spending one year in jail). Authorized, non-violent protests occurred with little incident. Opponents of the WWF held peaceful "counter forums" throughout the city simultaneously with the WWF. The WWF occurred during the official campaign period for March 29 municipal elections. Five parties held major rallies in Istanbul on March 22, the closing day of the Forum, with the largest drawing over 100,000 supporters of the ruling party to an area near the international airport. Public authorities aptly de-conflicted tens of thousands of party loyalists and WWF attendees. The net impact of the March 22 political rallies on the Forum was nil.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: The WWF provides a preview of what to expect for the World Bank/IMF Annual Meeting to be held in Istanbul on October 6-7. While the police presence will assuredly be greater to meet the larger numbers of expected protesters, the ability of the police to respond to unauthorized or violent protests at the WWF while handling an election campaign at full steam provides some indication of what to expect in October. The strong police presence and response to the May Day demonstrations 2008, which are expected to occur again in 2009, demonstrates the Turkish National Police's ability to field a sizable police force and put in place strict transportation controls to put a stop to any unauthorized protests (reftel B). The TNP have told us there will be far more road closures for the October meeting than during WWF. The venue will be different for the October meeting; the World Bank/IMF meeting will be in the downtown area of Harbiye, near public transportation and the five star hotels of Taksim. This will likely make transportation issues less of a problem, but will provide greater opportunities for opponents of the international meeting to stage protests.

Wiener